What Remains Behind

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/10756110.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	King Arthur (2004), Hannibal (TV), Hannibal Extended Universe - Fandom
Relationships:	Galahad/Tristan (Arthurian), Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Galahad (Arthurian), Tristan (Arthurian), Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham
Additional Tags:	Post-Canon, Alternate Universe - Soulmates, Reincarnation, Time Travel, Dreams, Fae & Fairies, Hurt/Comfort, Hypothermia, Caretaking, Naked Cuddling, First Kiss, Inadvisable Trips Up Mountainsides, Trope Subversion, Happy Ending, Hannibal Extended Universe
Language:	English
Collections:	#TristhadFest
Stats:	Published: 2017-04-29 Completed: 2017-05-01 Words: 4,332 Chapters: 3/3

What Remains Behind

by shiphitsthefan

Summary

Galahad travels aimlessly. He had a destination once—Tristan had spoken some of the lands that lay against the horizon, at the edge of the world and the rising of the sun. They weren't his home, but Tristan loved them like they were. Galahad thought for a while that it might be nice to visit there, to follow in Tristan's footsteps. Eventually, though, he'd given it up; like Tristan, they weren't his to have. Best to leave them in memory.

But when Galahad sleeps, pelts wrapped tightly around him, he dreams of blood and stars and a black sea, just as he has each night since Tristan's death. He stands on the edge of a great bluff, tracking the path of the moon with his eyes. Galahad knows that he's waiting; he simply isn't sure what for.

"See me," whispers a familiar voice. All Galahad has seen in these mountains is a great black stag.

Notes

I was nervous as fuck to write Tristhad, but Llewcie refused to talk me out of it, and then she betaed for me and was generally very encouraging. <3

This was enormously fun to write.

TW: There is a brief mention of self harm, but it is only alluded to, not depicted.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

“The thought of our past years in me doth breed

Perpetual benediction: not indeed

For that which is most worthy to be blest—

Delight and liberty, the simple creed

Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,

With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:”

—William Wordsworth, “ 536. Ode ”, 138-143

He knew better than to climb the mountain when the air smelt of snow, but Galahad lives only to learn the limits of his body now. The world is more *real* that way, when consequence hangs overhead like a burial shroud. There’s nothing but the fire in his veins, and the steel in his step; Galahad is no greater than the dirt or the trees or the wolves.

Tristan would have wanted this life, where death is the scale and not the balance. So Galahad lives it.

At least, he does now. Galahad tried a normal life, or as normal as was attainable after the horror of the final battle. He watched Tristan fall, and then Gawain took it upon himself to watch Galahad. Gawain had found him a wounded man, half mad with grief, burying Tristan’s arrows beneath his skin.

His brothers had never looked at Galahad in the same way after that. He couldn’t fault them.

Life with Gawain had been quiet, if only because Galahad didn’t know what to say. There were so many words he’d kept himself from sharing while Tristan still lived; it felt wrong to share them now. The fight and the sass had bled out of Galahad and into the mud alongside his sanity that night. But Gawain accepted him and his faults. Their time together had been amiable. Galahad had found a measure of reason again.

Still, Galahad bore no desire to settle down. There was no pretty young thing he wanted to find, no children he longed to sire. He and Gawain parted on good terms, though worry had clouded Gawain’s face.

Many months have passed since then.

Galahad travels aimlessly. He had a destination once—Tristan had spoken some of the lands that lay against the horizon, at the edge of the world and the rising of the sun. They weren’t

his home, but Tristan loved them like they were. Galahad thought for a while that it might be nice to visit there, to follow in Tristan's footsteps. Eventually, though, he'd given it up; like Tristan, they weren't his to have. Best to leave them in memory.

"You're obsessed with a ghost," Arthur had told him, looming overhead as Galahad tended his self-inflicted injuries. "There's nothing down that road but death."

It's a good road; it's treated Galahad well. Until now, at least.

He builds a shelter—bent saplings and leather thongs and snapped limbs of pine—and covers it with snow. Galahad believes it will be warm enough for the night, and then he can turn back tomorrow. *So much for the great black stag,* he thinks bitterly. After a week of tracking it, Galahad had only wound up here, trudging up a snow-covered peak, down to the last of his rations.

When Galahad sleeps, pelts wrapped tightly around him, he dreams of blood and stars and a black sea, just as he has each night since Tristan's death. He stands on the edge of a great bluff, tracking the path of the moon with his eyes. Galahad knows that he's waiting; he simply isn't sure what *for.*

"Perhaps you're a seer," Gawain had said, when Galahad shared his dream. "Maybe it's a vision."

"Of what?" he'd asked. "What could there possibly be to see when nothing ever changes?"

Gawain had shrugged. "We're only men. Who among us understands the sky?"

So Galahad stays vigilant, and waits for the night sky in his dream to explain itself.

It hasn't yet.

Breakfast is stale bread and dried berries, mashed to a paste and spread over top so Galahad can eat it while he walks. His intention had been to turn around, but that feels like giving up, and not even Tristan's death can kill his stubborn nature.

He's chasing...something. It feels bigger than the stag, though he's picked up its trail again. Galahad follows the sparse tracks from sun to sun. There isn't a reason *not* to seek it, not one that Galahad can come up with.

Dinner is dried fish, tough as the morning's bread. He'd hoped to find a rodent or a bird, but nothing seems to live this far up the mountain. Hardly any life but his own, and the stag's, and the mountain itself.

Galahad seals himself into the hollow of a dead tree for the night.

He dreams.

The ocean is smooth as a scrying mirror. Galahad looks down over the edge of the bluff, and sees the sharp rocks there for the first time, spattered with blood so rich and dark that it gleams in the moonlight.

For the first time, there's a puff of air at his back, like a breath against his neck. Galahad turns his head, his heart pounding in his chest.

He calls out Tristan's name, but Galahad's words are only smoke, curling into the breeze, over his head and out to sea. There's a cave behind him, though—Galahad's never noticed it before, had never thought to turn around to see. Perhaps the wind came from inside.

At the mouth of the cave, the stone bleeds, dark rivulets that bubble up between cracks in the floor. Galahad steps over it, or tries to, anyway. He looks down at his hands, and they're painted in new blood, red as clay. It clings to his tunic and his bare legs.

There's a resounding growl from deep within the cave, and the scraping of claws.

"See me," a familiar voice whispers, and Galahad spins back around.

No one's there.

Galahad has to dig his way out of the tree come morning. Fresh snow has fallen, packing down the snow he covered over the mouth of the hollow last night. His hands are numb with cold by the time he's freed himself.

Still troubled by his dreams, Galahad decides to save his breakfast for another meal. He fills his belly with melted snow, the chill more welcome in his throat than on his skin. When Galahad's finally completely unburied, he stands on frozen ground, mid-shin deep in the snow, and relieves himself into his former shelter. The snow gets pushed in on top. It's oddly satisfying.

Any tracks left by the stag yesterday are good and gone this morning, so Galahad keeps climbing up. Maybe he'll find a bluff, or perhaps a cave. There's no ocean to be found in the mountains, but his hands chap until they bleed, and that's familiar enough. Galahad walks sideways, kicking snow over drops of blood to hide his path—he feels like he's being followed, like the puff of warm air on his neck in his dream winds its way up the mountain behind him.

As the sun grows heavy in the sky, Galahad realizes that there's no cover to be found for the night. He finds a flat part of the mountainside and builds a wall from the snow. Sitting on one of his pelts, Galahad walls himself in until the sky is nothing more than a patch, then wraps himself up as best he can, knees pulled up to his chest. Another pelt draped over his head, because he doesn't know what else to do. There's no possibility of building a fire, and when the old sun falls out of the sky, it's dark as the ocean from his dreams.

No moon, no stars; Galahad feels like he's suffocating.

This is the first night where Galahad admits to himself that he is truly afraid. *I'll turn back in the morning,* he thinks, somehow sweating beneath all of his layers. He takes the fur off of his head, then wraps it over his hair and shoulders like some of the wise women he's seen. It seems like such a long time ago.

Sleep comes fitfully, but still, he dreams.

The ocean is black, silent, and calm. There is no blood amongst the rocks, only bits of flesh and broken bone. Looking at them, Galahad could swear that he's drowning, no matter how far above the water he stands. Just in case, he backs up a few steps; a bit of the bluff's edge crumbles and falls. There's no splash.

Galahad jumps when the breath paints a warm stroke across the back of his neck. It's closer tonight; he can feel the moisture of a mouth, though there are no lips to touch his skin. Tristan's name is a whisper on his tongue, and it warms his teeth, makes them stop chattering.

It takes longer to walk to the cave tonight, but the blood runs further out, crawling up Galahad's ankles and over his shins. Blood fades up his arms, too, as though he's reveled in a kill, barbaric as the man he loved, that he loves still.

Two warm tracks down his cheeks. A knife clutched heavy in his hand.

Please, don't lie to me.

The growl echoes out from the mouth of the cave, but Galahad inches in, anyway. We're hunting, *says a voice in his head, and he believes it. How could he not trust a man who begged for the truth mere moments before?*

It's darker than any dark night Galahad's ever known, deep here within the rock. He hears strange music, as if a series of bow strings are being plucked one at a time, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. They play for pleasure and not for battle, bow uncocked. It's beautiful, sweeter and deadlier than Guinevere, herself.

All of a sudden, there are two shining eyes peering at him; they're sharp, and Galahad can see his own reflection in them. He doesn't quite recognize himself—his hair is too short, and so is his beard. But there isn't much time to consider it as the smell of brimstone fills the air.

"You see me," says the voice from the night before—it's not Tristan, it's not *—and Galahad ducks to shield himself from the ball of flame.*

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your enthusiasm and comments so far! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Galahad struggles to open his eyes, and then unfold his arms, and then his legs. The snow fell heavier overnight—he has to push his way out of his bit of snow and rock, emerge as though a dead man from a grave. Tristan spoke of those once, Galahad suddenly remembers, of clay men beneath the ground, brought to unlife by wizards.

“Demons, you mean,” Galahad had corrected him, but Tristan only smiled and offered him the rest of his apple. He wishes now that he’d taken it then. An apple would be good, juicy and crisp and *perfect,* no matter what witchcraft or which isle it had come from.

“The fae make them grow,” Tristan had told Galahad, and then he’d used a word from the east that Galahad could never *hope* to say correctly. It rolled off of Tristan’s tongue easily enough, though; the sound of it kept Galahad warm many nights, and then hot as coals as he would spill over his fingers, thinking of Tristan’s devilish mouth.

“You’re bad as a Woad,” and that had made Tristan laugh. Every sound he made had been temptation, Arthur’s god forgive them both.

There’s nothing hot or warm or even cool here now, however. Galahad fights his way through the walls he built mere hours ago, frozen to ice with the morning dew and a sky full of clouds. He’s cold down to his bones; it’s pointless to turn around now, having more chance of finding a cave and a place to build a fire ahead of him than behind him, where Galahad already knows none exist.

“Stubborn pup,” the voice that isn’t Tristan whispers, and Galahad shakes his head to be rid of it.

He walks for a while to make his limbs wake up, then reaches into his pack for the last of the bread.

Except there isn’t a pack. Galahad’s left his pelts behind, too. *Some tracker I am.*

Retracing his steps is a daunting prospect, but Galahad turns to do it, anyway.

Except there are no prints. At least, none of his, but now he sees the tracks of the stag. They come toward him before stopping at his feet. Galahad looks to the snowy mountain path ahead of him, and sees that they continue.

There’s nothing to be done but keep going.

The further he walks, the warmer Galahad becomes. Now and then, he spots a tree, and that makes him glad, as well. It’s easier to wade into the snow when there’re friends to be found. Galahad begins to name them; Dagonet is the first, and then Lancelot.

He tries to name the third—a wicked-warped gray beast of a tree, like the horned god of the Woads—but doesn’t recognize the name. It’s heavy on his tongue; Galahad can’t tell if the weight is welcome or not.

A bird circles overhead, and Galahad swears he’s heard the song before. He watches it soar, then swoop down and fly off in the same direction as the stag’s hoofprints.

Galahad knows he’s warmer than he should be, but there’s a cave ahead—he can see a cave, it *must* be there—so he trudges on. Feathers begin to appear along the trail: a soft gray-brown, rounded, short; dream ocean black, barbed, long and wild. He stops to collect each one. It feels important.

Walking becomes crawling, but the cave is *so close,* yet so is the chill.

Crawling becomes pulling himself along the ground, cutting through the snow the way a snake slithers in the grass, and it’s right there, and so is the stag, and an eagle that alights on its antlers.

But Galahad can’t make it. He’s exhausted, and practically frozen. If he closes his eyes for a little while—a quick nap should be fine.

The eagle screeches, and Galahad knows he’s heard that same call before, but sleep calls to him much louder.

He dreams.

There’s no time to consider the sea because the bluff is eroding beneath Galahad’s feet. He runs into the cave, slipping in the blood, arm over his stomach, like he’ll fall apart if he doesn’t clutch his gut. The bow strings sing, but there’s still an arrow shot into Galahad’s shoulder. Something wet and warm drips into his eyes, and then down into his mouth. The iron is unmistakable.

This night, the knife in his hand weighs nothing, at all. Galahad knows the fire is coming and presses himself against the wall of the cave; the blast bounces back, and illuminates the foe.

A great red dragon. Galahad’s breath catches, but not before the taste of brimstone burns his lungs.

He hears Not-Tristan from a distance. "I discover you here," he says, "victorious." The words are so familiar; Galahad knows he's heard them once before, or twice, or a hundred, a thousand *times.*

"What sorcery is this?" Galahad asks, staring down the dragon.

"The rules of disorder."

Galahad turns and sees a veil behind him where the entrance to the cave once was. The mist obscures his vision, but Galahad sees a man behind it.

"I don't know you," he says, and the dragon snaps its teeth.

Almost-Tristan laughs and says, "You will."

Cracks; shards; a riddle.

"Don't leave me, not now that I've finally found you."

The flapping of wings; the stomping of hooves.

A fire, bright as shared suns.

Unrecognizable cursing; a voice he'd know anywhere.

Liquid spilling from his open mouth.

Another mouth; another drink; fingers running over his throat.

"This will hurt, but I promise it will pass."

Shouting;

"No,"

gasping;

"please, Galahad,"

choking.

"please, please, no…"

Galahad ducks under the dragon's maw, diving beneath its neck. His knife strikes and sinks into its soft underbelly, down where the scales don't grow. He pulls across, slicing, gutting; blood spills over his naked body, a baptism that Arthur and his church could never understand.

The corpse that lands atop him is only a man, and nothing more.

He pushes the body off of him. As he rises to his feet, panting, Galahad glances over at the veil. It's clearer now, a fog lifted, but still solid. The man behind it is clad all in white, and he stands with his hands clasped behind his back. His face is Tristan's, albeit older, grayer. The light in his eyes gleams as the dragon's had; they don't pierce through Galahad's skin now. He thinks that they might have once.

"Will," Almost-Tristan calls to him. His voice is haunted, yet hopeful.

"My name is Galahad."

"Very well," says Almost-Tristan. "Galahad, then." He tilts his head, appraising him. "Do you know me?"

Galahad steps closer, cautious—this man is deceptive, wild as Tristan, but his face is only a mask that shields a monster. "I might."

“Tell me, clever boy: where does the difference between the past and the future come from?”

“Yours?” Galahad blinks, confused. “It’s all starting to blur.” He shakes his head and asks, “How do I know that?”

But Almost-Tristan doesn’t say. “And yours?”

“Before you,” he immediately replies. “After you. I—I don’t understand.” Galahad creeps closer still, brandishing his knife, defending himself. “I want an admission,” he demands. “Admit what you are!”

“Which answer is it that you want to hear, Will?”

“What’s happening now and about to happen is an answ—” He chokes on his own words. The knife falls from his hand, and he rushes to the barrier. “Oh,” murmurs Galahad. Tears sting his eyes. “Oh.”

“We’re conjoined,” Hannibal explains, and he lifts a hand to the glass. “Every death of yours feels like one I am guilty of. Not just yours, but each of your lives stretching backward and forward through time.”

Will places his own palm against the wall that still separates them; he wonders if it will ever truly disappear. “You found me.”

“Wake up.” A kiss on the back of Will’s neck, and Hannibal begins to fade away in front of him.

“No, no, no!” His voice is frantic, even as he feels strong arms holding him close. “Where are you going?”

“Somewhere you can always find me.”

Chapter End Notes

I adore the "Will and Hannibal remember their previous lives" trope, but I'd never seen the reverse. Hopefully, it worked!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thank you, again, for all of the lovely words! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His body aches and trembles, like it's remembering how to work again. Still, he's warm, and there's plush fur beneath him, and a loving embrace around him; naked skin against naked skin, and strong legs tangled with his own.

"I watched you die," he says quietly. "Twice, I think. Once on a field and the other on a beach."

Arms squeeze him more tightly. "I'm glad you only recall the two." A pause, and then he asks, "What shall I call you?"

"Galahad. I don't think I ever really felt like a Will, even when I was one." He scrunches his nose. "That sounds more ridiculous than anything you could *ever* come up with."

There's a smile against Galahad's shoulder; jagged teeth press into his skin. "Whatever name you choose, you will always be an insolent pup."

"I don't *choose* Galahad, I *am* Galahad."

His breath is hot on the back of Galahad's neck, just as it was in the dream. "Then your Tristan I shall be."

Galahad takes one of Tristan's hands in his shaking fingers; he means to kiss his palm, but finds himself too weak to lift the hand to his lips. "Did you really die there at the wall?"

"I did. Several times."

"Then how—" Galahad's eyes close as his muscles spasm. Even his skin hurts, feeling like it's pulled too tightly across his bones.

"The fae make the apples grow," he says, taking his hand back so he can rub it over Galahad's arm, "and I know much about apples."

Galahad snorts. "That's hardly an answer."

"It's all that I have." Tristan nuzzles the side of Galahad's neck, noses up his jaw and under his ear. As he speaks, his stubble scratches Galahad's skin. "I die, and then I find myself alive

elsewhere. For as long as I remember, it has been this way. Each time, I look for you—sometimes I find you, but you never seem to know me."

The idea makes Galahad's heart race in his chest. "And your first death—"

"—Was here, when I fell to Cerdic. I dreamt of my other lives before then, of my rebirths. I knew I was yōkai from those first dreams, that my parentage was nigi-mitama. But you were nowhere in my wanderings beyond the veil, so they mattered to me very little."

"Fae," Galahad clarifies. "You are immortal, then?"

Tristan shakes his head against Galahad's shoulder. "My soul is but a traveler."

"So are you Hannibal, or Tristan, or someone else entirely?"

Another grin. "I am yours." Still, even as he smiles, his voice turns quickly to pain. "At the end—before I found you here—I was Hannibal. Always Hannibal, and you Will, but I never could make you know me. The endless repetition of that life made me cruel."

Galahad swallows. "Did you...hurt me?" He feels a ghost of pain in his belly just as Tristan's hand moves to caress it.

"You have died at my hands, or because of them, more times than I care to recount. All I seemed to know was death—"

"—And violence was all I understood," finishes Galahad.

"But I learned to love you again, pup," Tristan tells him. "I found ways to repeat the same portion of years over without suffering another becoming. There were...signs. Sigils." He shakes his head, and his braids drag across Galahad's skin. "Spells, I think. They were complex—my hands knew them, though I did not."

Galahad buries his face in the crook of the arm that supports his head, twisting his body. "Yet I never truly saw you."

"Not until the last, no." He huffs a laugh. "You threw us off a cliff in your passion."

"That does sound like something I would do," and his shoulders shake as he chuckles through his tears. "Maybe if I'd told you of my love before…" Tristan's pulse hammers in his wrist, pounds against Galahad's navel. "Maybe you would have found me sooner."

Tristan sighs, holds him tighter still, as though Galahad could leave at any moment. "I taught you too well. You would have been difficult to track, love known or no."

"But you *did* find me."

"And almost lost you again." Tristan's palm finds its way to Galahad's heart. "What were you doing in the snow?"

“Chasing you, I think. There was a great black stag—I was drawn to it to the point of madness.”

“What of your scars?”

Tristan’s palm skims across his skin, stopping on the old wounds covering Galahad’s thigh. His cock stirs, even through the pain of his body thawing. “My first madness. I grieved you too much.”

“Oh, pup.” He moves away, then pulls on Galahad’s shoulder, carefully turning him to lie on his back, and there is Tristan, inexplicably alive, cheeks full and tattooed, eyes kind but wet, the right age, the right braids, the right shade of tan, sun-kissed and so, so beautiful.

“It’s you,” Galahad murmurs, and his palm finds its way to Tristan’s face. His fingers trace his brow, his eyelids, the prominence of his bone. “It’s really you.”

Tristan blinks, and Galahad catches his tears. They hold each other’s face in their hands—Galahad has the uncanny feeling that Tristan has done this before, though far more kindly now. For long moments, they do nothing but look at each other; Galahad has wanted this, yearned for this closeness, the feeling of skin caressing skin, of mingled breath. Their foreheads touch, and then Galahad ducks his head, pressing his ear to Tristan’s chest to count his heartbeats, and throws a leg over his hips. It hurts, his muscles still stiff, but Galahad is relieved to be joined with him so intimately.

One of them groans, or perhaps both of them; Galahad no longer knows where he begins and ends, he and Tristan blurred, a single soul. Tristan slots his thigh between Galahad’s legs, nails lightly scratching down his spine. When he reaches Galahad’s ass, Tristan grips a firm cheek and brings them closer still. He rolls their hips together, gentle with Galahad’s worn-out body; this isn't the rutting of animals, but the making of love.

Tristan’s lips bury themselves in Galahad’s hair; he hears him take a shaky breath. “I have waited lifetimes to kiss you.”

Galahad tips his head back, gazing up at him. “Then wait no longer.”

Their first kiss is the barest caress, not a rough claiming, nothing like Galahad imagined. Then again, Tristan is no longer the person he believed him to be, either. Galahad has never been kissed before, and he fears that his inexperience will show. It doesn’t matter; Tristan is a force of nature, graceful and sure. He leads, and Galahad follows.

He always has. He believes that he always will.

They moan into each other’s mouths, spilling between their shared skin. Galahad’s chest heaves with his breath; his eyes are heavy with sleep, the exertion too much for his recovering body. Tristan kisses him again, dipping his tongue into Galahad’s mouth. He’s so tired that he finds it difficult to reciprocate, but he receives Tristan’s adoration all the same.

“I’m afraid to sleep,” says Galahad when they part. “I don’t want to wake up and have this be a dream.”

Tristan’s finger lifts Galahad’s chin. “No matter what,” he vows, “I will always find you.”

Galahad nods, letting himself be cradled against the fur of Tristan’s chest, nostrils full of the smell of burning embers and sweat. Tristan runs his fingers through the tangle of Galahad’s curls, massaging his scalp. Sleep finds him all too easily, but Galahad relaxes into it, trusting that Tristan will remain solid and real come morning.

He doesn’t dream.

Chapter End Notes

And they lived happily ever after, then and many, many more times to come. :D

End Notes

[about me] [tumblr] [twitter]

Kudos and comments validate my existence. <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!